Panel Rejects Joint Hill Unit On Intelligence

By Walter Pincus
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President Ford's proposal that a joint congressional committee on intelligence be established was rejected yesterday at the Senate Government Operations Committee quickly moved to draft a resolution that would set up a Senate Committee on Intelligence Activities.

The joint committee proposal, offered by Sen. William Brock (R-Tenn.), was withdrawn after tough criticism of House handling of its intelligence investigation.

Brock said, "I have been disgusted with the House," and added that "they can go ahead and make idiots out of Congress and the intelligence agencies" if they establish their own House committee.

The Senate and House last year set up select committees to investigate alleged abuses by U.S. intelligence agencies. The House committee has already gone out of business, and the Senate committee's mandate expires at the end of this month.

Sen. Charles Percy (R-Ill.) said he initially favored a new joint committee out changed his mind. The House, he said, "is essentially on a Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday schedule" which would make serious joint work on intelligence oversight difficult.

Committee Chairman Sen. Abraham A. Ribicoff (D-Conn.) said a joint committee would make the Senate captive to the House, which he said "had different policies on secrecy" from the Senate.

Public reaction to leaks of the House intelligence committee report was the focus of debate among committee members over how a new Senate committee should protect its secrets.

The committee's draft bill bars any member from disclosing intelligence agency information publicly without committee authorization.

Sen. William Roth (R-Del.) and Sen. Walter Huddleston (D-Ky.) offered an amendment establishing procedures by which a member who disclosed information could be investigated by the Senate Select Committee on Standards and Conduct.

Sen. Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.) cautioned that such a proposal limited the "speech and debate clause," a section of the Constitution that gives total immunity to a member speaking on the floor of Congress.

Percy said the Roth-Huddleston language would "place such a restriction on a member that he might not want to serve" on the new committee.

Sen. Lawton Chiles (D-Fla.), in supporting Huddleston, said, "People back home are appalled by the House . . . There has got to be some kind of self-restraint."

A final vote is set for today on the Roth-Huddleston secrecy amendment and on language that would give the Senate, rather than the President, final say over what classified material is publicly disclosed. Mr. Ford, in his message to Congress Wednesday, said that the President should decide what material is released.